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Pamph. Social Woman S.
Mrs. Francis M. Scott.

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

OF THE

SENATE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK,

MARCH 24TH, 1897,

BY

MRS. FRANCIS M. SCOTT

REPRESENTING THE

ASSOCIATION OPPOSED TO THE

EXTENSION OF THE SUFFRAGE

TO WOMEN.



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PRINTERS AND STATIONERS,
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GENTLEMEN :

It is my privilege to appear before you to-day to state as briefly as I can some of the reasons why the New York State Association Opposed to the Extension of the Suffrage prays you not to report favorably on the Concurrent Resolution to strike out the word "Male" from Article II, Section I, of the State Constitution.

The arguments in favor of the proposed change have been reiterated for thirty years. If strenuous assertion could stand for fact, and plausibility for truth, if only the old, the ignorant or the indifferent women were arrayed against the Resolution, I should have no business here. Reason and logic, however, support the arguments of the Opposition, and youth, intelligence and enthusiasm are arrayed to bar the way of unwise and ill-considered legislation.

My task is to try to prove to this Committee the justice of the attitude of the Association for which I speak.

In any argument the point of departure is of paramount importance. Given a wrong premise, a structure fair and goodly in appearance may be raised, but strike at its weak foundation and it crumbles and disappears.

My point of departure is the simple acceptance of a fact about which there can be no argument. The existence of a fundamental difference between men and women.

With the recognition of this unalterable truth, I am not afraid to try conclusions with your petitioners for change.

The first necessity of a Government is Law. Without law Government cannot exist, or let me, preferably, say Government is the enforcement of Law. The necessity of enforcement is a question admitting of no doubt. Whether a country has a governing class, or, as in our own case, its citizens govern one another, the authorities must be vested with power to *enforce* the Laws.

We women can persuade men, we can influence them, there are those among us who can sway opinion by their magnetic eloquence, but can we enforce the law? Would persuasion have conquered the Indian; or gentle influence freed our colonies; or the greatest eloquence alone have destroyed slave-holding and preserved the integrity of our country?

Shall we, then, be given power to create the laws when we are confessedly unable to enforce them—

Or shall not our persuasions, our influence, our eloquence be used to counsel and advise you in framing the laws, leaving to you their enactment as we must look to you for their enforcement.

There has been a frequently made claim that the suffrage is an inherent right inuring to every citizen by reason of his citizenship, but there has never been conceded to men an inherent right to vote. It has been exhaustively proven that every extension of the suffrage has been a matter of governmental expediency. There is, however, one single view of the case under which every man may claim a right to vote.

It is the view which bars all women out.

It is the concession that all men are equal in that they are—broadly and generically speaking—physical equals, the enormous majority being able each one to protect himself from the aggression of any other man. This is the only possible sense in which we can understand that men are equal; as in mental capacity, education or wealth, our country shows as broad contrasts as any in the world.

This is a demonstration of the inequality of men and women, for were the average women to be attacked by the average man she could protect neither her property, her life nor her honor!

It is plain to see how quickly the suffragists' claims of equality and an inherent right to vote vanish into thin air under the strong illuminating sunlight of unsentimental common sense.

It will be urged upon you that the working-woman would be largely benefited by being given the vote; that her position as a wage-earner would be improved because her political importance would place her where she could command higher wages, and that the woman's vote would be used to compel legislation directing the more liberal payment of women.

The power that you wield for the good of all citizens may well be used in behalf of these women. There are, however, some obvious reasons why women's wages have a tendency to keep lower than men's. One of them is that only a small proportion of women are wage-earners for many years of their lives. The working girl, commonly, naturally and humanly selects an "inevitable he" and leaves her income-making work to do a no less valuable one in making a home for him; while the man who began work at about the same age as his wife did, and has reached about the same state of efficiency at the time of marriage, goes on with his trade, or business, or profession, growing more valuable *because* he is a husband, and usually a father, and has an interest in the community which inspires him to thoroughness, and faithfulness to his employer.

This condition creates a large class of wage-earning women who never advance beyond a certain degree of competency because they have as a rule no expectation, nor desire to pursue their calling indefinitely, but contemplate marriage as a probable contingency, which as a matter of fact occurs in the vast majority of cases. As a result their wage-earning years are few, and their ranks are constantly filled from below.

Apparently these women are in many cases doing the same work as men. That is, they are clerks, typewriters, stenographers, etc., but in reality they seldom reach the same state of efficiency as the men who are pursuing a definite career in which they expect to continue during their whole lives.

When an employer is seeking to fill a place for which there are many applicants of equal efficiency, the man with a wife and children is preferred to the married man without

children, and he in turn is considered before the man without family, and the man with a family to support will be justly preferred to the single woman.

Where identical work is done, identical payment should be the rule; and even now at the top of the ladder there exists no difference. With authors, artists, musicians, actors, there is no question of sex, only of accomplishment. The quality of the work is the only test of its value. We can scarcely doubt that this salutary test will be the universal one of the future, and as it exists among the great it will work gradually down to the lowest work and lowliest workers.

This is only touching upon a grave question, but it is enough to show that conditions of life—not the ballot—are what control employment and wages. That legislation can and ought to, effect only an inappreciable number of cases, and that the inexorable law of supply and demand will do the rest, both supply and demand being immediately affected by the natural differences between men and women. The claim of mental equality it seems idle to discuss. As a matter of fact the general intelligence and education of women are not so great at the present day as those of men. But practically every source of education has been opened to woman, and every opportunity for usefulness, excepting political office-holding, is her's to use; the world watches her growth and development with intensest interest and no one would put out a hand to hinder her progress.

Furthermore, neither the claim of mental equality nor that of moral superiority have any bearing upon the extension of the Suffrage to women. The tests of mental capacity or moral character have never been used to prove the men of this State especially fitted for the ballot, and therefore there appears to be no reason why they should be urged as a claim for the admission of women to the suffrage.

As to the contention that the Extension of the Suffrage to women will lead to the enactment of more efficient laws

for the advancement of morality, or stricter enforcement of those laws which have been or may be made, why should we pose as the *only* agents for good. Can we look into the past and not acknowledge that the moral standard has grown steadily higher, and that the government by men has, on the whole, done no despicable work in the cause of morality.

Are we not each born of a man and woman, and can we escape the sad sharing of an inheritance of evil, and a glad bond of inherited aspiration. That sharing and that bond are what make us strong to work together. Together, but not in identical ways. The balance of power among nations but typifies a social and political balance of power among us as a race. It cannot be disturbed without disaster. We should share and divide the work of the world, not strain and strive to do the same work. Above all, no work should be taken up by either of us which would interfere with our highest work as fathers and mothers. If fatherhood interfered with the performance of public duty, public duty could not be performed by men.

Motherhood must interfere with the performance of public duty. Even wifehood alone gives a woman the intimate and peremptory duty of home-making, and debars her from answering the demands of an inexorable public, if she gives her best self to the work she deliberately takes up when she marries.

You are asked to give *all* women the ballot. Not the widow and the spinster only, but all women, and I am here to ask you whether women are not already doing their full half of the world's work; to beg you to consider whether they have done their share so well, with so much time and energy, and ability to spare, that you are justified in asking them to take a part of your work in addition, and finally to impress upon you the fact that I speak for thousands of women, who look to your decision to leave them opportunity for consistent development, and pray that their lives may not be hampered and held back by the obligation to enter upon political life with its distractions, its struggles and contentions.

